



GIPSA News

A newsletter for the employees of the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration

November 2007

FGIS Holds Second All-Employee Open Forum

Dave Shipman, Washington, DC

On October 4, 2007, FGIS employees gathered in offices, conference rooms, and around telephones across the country to talk about current initiatives, direction, and priorities. This was our second Forum, and built on the successes and feedback from our April 2007 meeting.

The full meeting minutes are posted on *inGIPSA*, under Plans and Reports, but I'd like to recap a few of the highlights of what we discussed.

We opened with *FGISonline*, and an overview of each of the applications by our project managers. As I mentioned at the Forum, the 17 *FGISonline* applications involve FGIS personnel in every aspect of development and operation. More than 16 percent of FGIS staff has been involved or currently is working on *FGISonline* applications. Our field and headquarters employees are project managers, team members, and technical experts. Several of the applications are behind the scene-type systems that have been operational for over a year and provide a foundation upon which other applications, such as certification, function. Right now, field offices are using the Certificates and Inspection Data Warehouse applications, and we have received high marks on performance from both employees and customers. Our Delegation, Designation, and Exporter Registration (DDR) application has been deployed and running for more than a year. State and private entities are using it to apply for authority to provide official inspection services, and grain firms are using it to register as grain exporters.

Applications under development include:

- Inspection, Testing and Weighing (ITW) — replaces Cu-Sum, plus covers most other official inspection and weighing work and will directly feed the certification application, thus reducing the chance of transcription errors and improving productivity;
- Equipment Capability Testing (ECT) — provides a complete system to transmit, analyze, and file equipment checktesting information;
- Licensing — web-based process to apply for a license, take an exam, issue a license, and maintain all records;
- Quality Assurance/Quality Control (QAQC) — an expansion of our current QAQC system to bring performance information directly to all service providers; and
- LIMS21 — an improved system to capture and manage the wide array of information generated at the Technical Services Division.

As these applications roll out over the next 12 to 18 months, FGIS employees will have access to new tools to further improve the way we do business.

*Continued, see **Open Forum** on page 4.*

Names in the News

PERSONNEL

Ross Heiman, agricultural marketing specialist, will join the FGIS Market and Program Analysis Staff at the Beacon facility in Kansas City on November 13, 2007. **Ross** comes to GIPSA from Informa Economics, an agricultural consulting firm. He has a background in farming and agricultural economics. **Ross** will be responsible for all standards-related matters pertaining to corn and oilseeds, and will take part in data and economic analyses.

NEW ARRIVAL

Congratulations to **Jennifer Zuckman**, Office of International Affairs, who welcomed third child, **Asher**, to the world on October 15, 2007. **Asher** was 21 inches long and weighed in at 7.5 pounds.

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CONDOLENCES

Mitch Doak, Kansas City Field Office, passed away. He had been ill for an extended time. **Mitch** had worked in the Kansas City Field Office for the last 17 years; and in the Greenville, Mississippi, and Galveston, Texas, offices prior to that. He had worked for FGIS for 32 years. Donations may be made in his name to: ALS Division of the Muscular Dystrophy Association, Inc.; Attention: Kathryn Peters; 15301 W. 87th St., Pkwy #255; Shawnee Mission, Kansas 66219. **Mitch** provided a lot of support and help to this group.

AWARDS

Carnell Barrett, Jr., Information Technology Staff (ITS), received an extra effort award for knowledge and customer support of VPN, VTC, Microsoft Desktop, and Altiris, that led to the success of the GIPSA ITS Operations Branch.

Matthew Bass, Midwestern Regional Office, received a spot award for sustained effort in the performance and conduct of an investigation of a large dealer that failed to pay in excess of \$2 million.

Ronald Beukema, ITS, received an extra effort award for his role in the E-Business office to provide technical support for the CuSum system, and support of the GIPSA public website.

Amy Blechinger, Policy and Litigation Division (PLD), Washington, DC, received an extra effort award in recognition of outstanding perfor-

mance and increasing program effectiveness and productivity of the division.

Kaye Burnep, ITS, received an extra effort award for support of the Toledo Field Office, inventory control, CuSum support and customer service leading to the success of the ITS Operations Branch.

Albert Conerly, Management Support Staff, received an extra effort award for outstanding leadership in providing meaningful and capable support services to GIPSA programs and staff offices.

William Crutchfield, P&SP Office of the Deputy Administrator, received an extra effort award for leading “change” in P&SP.

Margaret Cummings, ITS, received an extra effort award for support of the P&SP Midwestern Regional Office Resident Agents, P&SP application support, TSD support inventory control, and customer support leading to the success of the ITS Operations Branch.

Mark Dickson, ITS, received an extra effort award for his support of the Training Management System, Export Grain Inspection System, the Grain Inspection and Weighing Information System, and for his involvement in the modernization effort as a database administrator.

Erin Dubroc, New Orleans, received a time-off award for accepting additional duties when the clerical staff was shorthanded and continued to provide timely service to customers.

Continued, see Names on page 6.

FBI Recognizes WRO

John Barthel, Western Regional Office

Robert S. Mueller III, Director, Federal Bureau of Investigation, recently issued certificates of appreciation to **Marlys Sahlin**, senior auditor, **Jamie McDougal**, resident agent, and me for the cooperation and assistance provided to the FBI in what began as a packer trust rapid response investigation and later evolved into a criminal bankruptcy fraud case.

The certificates from Director Mueller read, *“In recognition of your outstanding assistance to the FBI in connection with its investigative efforts. Your cooperation was of immeasurable help to our representatives. I share their gratitude for your support, which assisted them in carrying out their responsibilities. You can take pride in the role you played in the success achieved, and my associates and I congratulate you on a job well done.”*

The Assistant U.S. Attorney assigned to the case cited GIPSA’s rapid response investigation as a contributing factor to the success of the criminal investigation. The prompt notification of the statutory trust responsibilities caused the respondents to quickly convert assets to cash and abandon the packing plant. In their haste, the respondents created a financial trail which allowed the FBI to trace financial assets, seize them, and develop evidence of bankruptcy fraud. Richard Fagan, FBI senior resident agent, reported that one respondent pled guilty and is currently serving the sentence at a Federal penitentiary. The second is awaiting a sentencing hearing.

Donations for Wildlife

Vicki Kottke, Moscow

During fiscal year 2007, the Moscow office donated over 1,700 pounds of edible beans, split peas, and lentils to local food banks, and also contributed approximately 8,500 pounds of grain, peas, lentils, and garbanzo beans to the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDF&G) and various wildlife associations in the area. The associations, which are closely affiliated with the IDF&G and the Washington State Department of Fish and Game, are dedicated to the preservation of all wildlife. These associations and IDF&G, in turn, distribute these commodities to anyone interested in helping wildlife in their area by providing feed during the winter. Recently, the field office received a Certificate of Appreciation from the Latah Wildlife Association in recognition of our donations.

Regulatory Info

Tess Butler, Washington, DC

Federal Register Publications

- The Role of USDA in Differentiating Grain Inputs for Ethanol Production and Standardizing Testing of the Co-Products of Ethanol Production – Notice of Reopening and Extension of Comment Period, published October 5, 2007

Issuances

Terri Henry, Washington, DC

- P&SP Program Directive 9700-40, “Civil Penalty Stipulation Agreement,” dated September 26, 2007
- P&SP Policy Memorandum 9720-07-029, “Dual Registration of Packer Buyers,” dated October 5, 2007
- FGIS Program Directive 9180.71, “Fumonisin Testing Services,” dated October 1, 2007
- FGIS Program Directive 9180.74, “Service Fees and Billing Codes,” dated October 1, 2007

Open Forum, from page 1.

We also talked about the impact of retirements on operations and how we are preparing our employees for the future. To help address the future leadership needs of the Agency, 20 GIPSA employees are taking part in a year-long Leadership Development Program (LDP). We have Agricultural Commodity Grader development programs running in the New Orleans, League City, and Portland offices with additional sessions expected in 2008. We have also, at the recommendation of the Organizational Assessment Survey Action Team, established an ongoing technical training program, the Specialized Enhancement Program (SEP), in the three major export markets. The SEP is designed to update personnel on the latest technical policies and procedures that are essential to carrying out the daily activities of the inspection and weighing program. Finally, we talked about the opportunities offered by AgLearn, which is home to more than 4,000 free courses, including 12 specific to FGIS. I encourage all employees to make greater use of this invaluable resource that is filled with courses to help in all facets of professional and personal development.

We also touched on performance appraisals, which were identified as an area needing improvement by the Organizational Assessment Survey Action Team. To improve the process, we are providing performance management training to all supervisors and managers; aligning performance standards with Agency strategic goals; and evaluating available software tools that can help both supervisors and employees better communicate expectations and performance.

We wrapped up the meeting with a discussion about Kansas City operations. In accordance with long-term plans, oversight functions are becoming centralized in Kansas City. Field Management Division has established a Field Operations and Support Staff headed by Diane Palecek, and a Quality Assurance and Control Staff, which is headed by Ken Critchfield. In addition, FMD has hired six highly qualified inspectors currently stationed at the Beacon facility in Kansas City. These graders report to the Wichita Field Office and with assistance from the Board of Appeals and Review (20 miles away at TSD) monitor the grading accuracy of 38 percent of the inspections performed nationwide. Within a year, they will be transferred to TSD to become the central Grading Services Laboratory. This chart outlines roles and responsibilities of the new and existing units in Kansas City.

All of these units, plus personnel from the Market and Program Analysis Staff, Compliance Division, and Information Technology Staff will be collocated at our National Grain Center in the fall of 2008. The Center will be at the site of the current Technical Center, which will undergo renovation, and be expanded with a second building.

We covered a lot of ground and talked about many issues during the Forum. While teleconferencing is not the ideal communication tool, it is one of many options we will continue to use to talk about our current and future initiatives and direction.

My thanks to all FGIS and other GIPSA personnel who took the time to participate in the Open Forum.

CENTRALIZATION OF OVERSIGHT OF FGIS PROGRAMS			
TECHNICAL SERVICES DIVISION		FIELD MANAGEMENT DIVISION	
BOARD OF APPEALS AND GRADING SERVICES	EQUIPMENT TESTING SERVICES	QUALITY ASSURANCE AND CONTROL STAFF	FIELD OPERATIONS AND SUPPORT STAFF
<p>Board of Appeals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Directly monitor field office and agency QASs in order to measure their accuracy. •Directly monitor the Grading Services Laboratory to measure their accuracy. •Provide technical training when required. •Analyze foreign complaint samples •Approve all interpretative line prints. •Perform Board Appeals <p>Grading Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Inspect and input data for limited and targeted selected samples from service locations as a means to monitor performance of local quality plans. •Prepare testing and training materials for the official system, when needed. •Grade and score practical exam separations returned after tests are taken (assuming sample separations are used instead of test strips which will have answer keys developed by Grading Services Lab). •Provide appeal inspection services. •Provide opinion services to official service providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Develop, implement, and administer the equipment checktesting program. •Provide equipment checktesting for all GIPSA and Official Agencies. •Provide guidance to field offices and the Field Operations Staff regarding Diverter Type (DT) Samplers. •Maintain the DT sampler database. •Approve equipment types for use in the official inspection system. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Develop, implement, and oversight of the quality assurance and control process. •Review adequacy of local quality control processes and monitor conformance of the local plans. •Analyze quality assurance data and, working with other internal and external groups, recommend action to resolve issues regarding the performance of the official system. •Adjust monitor sample selections based on performance information. Default sample selections should be generated by IDW and QAQC data based on rules developed by GIPSA. •Troubleshoot quality issues. •Assure accuracy of periodic and annual reports of performance measures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Administer the licensing program. •Administer the FGIOnline applications assigned to FMD. •Administer financial aspects for FMD (official agency billing, budget preparation and execution, monitor revenue/costs and prepare reports for FMD, administration of purchases and payments, and serve as liaison with the Budget and Planning Staff and other associated activities). •Coordinate and manage Resident Agents in the grain program. •Provide policy and procedural support to official service providers. •Provide support for human resources in the field. •Review and respond to compliance reviews and coordinate actions in response to these reports. •Serve as primary contact for official service providers.

!!!Thank You!!!

Joanne Peterson, GIPSA FOIA Officer, Washington, DC

As GIPSA begins another fiscal year of processing requests under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), I want to offer my sincere gratitude to all GIPSA employees who helped me during FY 2007.

FOIA, enacted in 1966, is a Federal statute that provides the public with access to government information. Public requests for disclosure of records are the best known type of FOIA disclosure. Any member of the public may request access to information held by Federal agencies without showing a need or reason for seeking the information. FOIA is continuously developing. Most recently, in 2005, it was amended to set new standards for FOIA operations by directing agencies to improve their service and performance.

Federal agencies' annual reports show that processing efforts have not kept pace with the volume of requests received. Agencies must respond to a FOIA requester within 20 workdays, otherwise the request is considered to be in backlog status. The 2005 amendment required agencies to reduce their FOIA backlogs. GIPSA, like all agencies, tracks the number of days it takes to complete a request—from the day it is received until the day the response is sent, and, in turn, the median processing time of all completed requests.

GIPSA handles simple and complicated requests. Simple requests take less time to process and seek information such as tariff schedules; listings of auction markets, dealers, packing houses; and inspection and weighing documentation. Complex requests involve extensive search efforts, review, and processing efforts such as those related to investigation reports.

Despite fiscal year 2007 being one of GIPSA's busiest FOIA years, we met the time standards with flying colors. We received 151 FOIA requests, compared to 112 received in FY 2006. Of those, 144 were simple and 7 were complex. I am happy to report that GIPSA ended FY 2007 with no requests in backlog status and achieved a median processing time of 5 days for simple requests and 39 for complex requests. To sum up, **ALL** requests we received in FY 2007 were processed and closed by the end of the fiscal year, with most completed way ahead of the statutory timeframe.

FOIA is an Agency effort, so I can't take full credit for GIPSA's outstanding year-end numbers. I cannot carry out my reviews, make release determinations, and prepare responses without your help. Your search for, and photocopying and prompt delivery of responsive documents; your quick responses for tariff schedules and registrant listings; and the discussions I had with you about your programs and documents made it possible for me to do my job as GIPSA's FOIA Officer.

I want to thank, specifically, the following people for their assistance to me during the fiscal year: **Amy Blechinger, Carla Camre, Margaret Cummings, Agnes Flinn, Bruce Gardner, Tim Hansen, Glenda Lasseigne, Tanisha Mapes, Brett Offutt, Elkin Parker, Kristi Pirtle, Jeani Plautz, George Pulwicz, Kraig Roesch, John Rollins, Roger Schneider, Patti Tolle, LaDondra Taylor, Terry Taylor, and Gretchen Van Walbeek.**

Again, my sincere appreciation to everyone who helped me, and I look forward to working with all of you during FY 2008.

Personnel Benefit News

FEHB OPEN SEASON! The Federal Employee Health Benefits (FEHB) "Open Season" begins November 12, 2007, and ends December 10, 2007. Changes to the health benefits will take effect on January 6, 2008. Please contact your benefits servicing specialist for information and your employee servicing office for forms.

FLEXIBLE SPENDING ACCOUNTS. Employees enrolled in a flexible spending account (FSA) can begin making elections for next year (2008). Employees must re-enroll each year, since contributions for the current year end on December 31, 2007. For more information on FSA's, contact your benefits servicing specialist.

GIPSA headquarters personnel should contact Michael Murphy at telephone 202-690-4240. GIPSA field personnel should contact Sharon Hudoba at 612-336-3365.

**Are EEO/CR issues or concerns affecting your employment with GIPSA?
Do you have questions?
Need help?**

Then let your voice be heard.

Call the EEO Advisory Committee at...

1-800-639-5167

Civil Rights Hotline

Names from page 2.

Thomas Duggan, Western Regional Office, received an extra effort award for outstanding performance as Business Practices Unit Supervisor. **Tom's** accomplishments and dedication to his work in leading his unit through change, conducting large, complex investigations, and implementing Business Process Re-engineering contributed greatly to the success of the WRO in FY 07.

Angela Emrich, ITS, received an extra effort award for outstanding support, personal commitment, technical skills, and teamwork while organizing and maintaining the GIPSA telecommunications billing and servicing, which led to significant cost savings to the Agency.

Stuart Frank, Midwestern Regional Office, received an extra effort award for exemplary dedication and leadership, resulting in the office successfully completing the 2007 Business Plan.

Bruce Gardner, Midwestern Regional Office, received an extra effort award for exemplary dedication and leadership, resulting in the Midwestern Regional Office successfully completing the 2007 Business Plan.

Joseph Garrity, ITS, received an extra effort award for continued knowledge and perseverance in ensuring that GIPSA is current with Departmental security initiatives, along with ensuring our IT environment remains safe from threat.

Tracy Gerke, ITS, received a spot award for outstanding personal commitment, technical skills, and teamwork on the Agency application modernization.

Bruce Griffith, ITS, received an extra effort award for leadership,

personal commitment, technical skills, and teamwork as ITS' Network Branch Chief.

Mack Hall, New Orleans, received a spot award for consistently contributing to the quality and efficiency of the Agency by volunteering his services to complete all aspects of the job.

Lawrence Haller, Industry Analysis Division, received an extra effort award for developing an MS Access database for entering packer data and developing an interface with the existing SAS software program to analyze the data and check for data accuracy.

Milton Hansen, Western Regional Office, received a time-off award for his contribution to revising the P&SP scale pamphlet. Milt's expertise and knowledge greatly enhanced the product.

Timothy Hansen, Policy and Litigation Division, received an extra effort award in recognition of outstanding performance and increasing program effectiveness and productivity of the division.

Tanika Harris, ITS, received an extra effort award for continued professionalism and assistance in managing the VPN, Microsoft Desktop, and customer support, leading to the success of the ITS Operations Branch.

Anita Heckenbach, FMD Quality Assurance and Control Staff, received a spot award for assistance and support of IT projects, which benefited GIPSA.

Adel Ibrahim, ITS, received an extra effort award for support of the League City Field Office, inventory control, and CuSum support, leading to the success of the GIPSA ITS

Operations Branch.

Morris Johnson, ITS, received an extra effort award for outstanding personal commitment, technical skills, and teamwork on the Agency telecommunications, UTN project, and remote location support.

Robert Kayne, ITS, received an extra effort award for his role on the GIPSA Application Modernization, and for assisting with the development and deployment of reports for various applications.

William Kelly, ITS, received an extra effort award for outstanding personal commitment, technical skills, and teamwork on supporting the GIPSA network and electronic mail modernization.

Pamela Lake, Eastern Regional Office, received a spot award for her assistance and support of IT projects which benefited GIPSA.

James Lambert, ITS, received an extra effort award for his invaluable resourcefulness in the E-Business Office and support of the PC-Lims and Swine Contract Library applications.

Irma Lightner-Reimer, Midwestern Regional Office, received a spot award for outstanding contributions and initiative as a new employee with minimal supervision in assuming responsibility of the scale mission.

Tammi Lindsey, Budget and Planning Staff, received an extra effort award for initiative and extra effort to improve the clearing of Interagency Payments and Collections System bills and enable GIPSA to attain a perfect financial management scorecard.

*Continued, see More Names
on page 8.*

Travel Bits & Pieces

Monica Alexander, Washington, DC

Premium Travel Guidance. Effective October 2, 2007, all USDA employees seeking to purchase *premium* travel accommodations (business or first class) must obtain advanced approval from the USDA Chief Financial Officer Chuck Christopherson.

In a memo to all USDA employees, Acting Secretary of Agriculture Charles Conner provided interim guidance on the circumstances and process for authorizing premium travel. The purpose of the interim guidance is to manage and reduce the usage of premium travel accommodations. Federal government employees are required to use economy travel unless a justifiable circumstance prohibits the mode of travel. The interim guidance provides assurance and consistency across the USDA in implementing the Department's travel accommodations policy. Premium travel obtained through the use of frequent flyer miles or at the employee's expense is exempt from the approval process. GIPSA employees seeking to book premium travel should review the interim guid-

ance and forward any requests to Mr. Christopherson *through* your travel approving official for approval prior to scheduling and purchasing the arrangements.

The guidance will be posted on *inGIPSA* and e-mailed to all GIPSA employees. If you need a paper copy or further information, please contact your servicing officer, me at (202) 720-7045, or **Rose Alexander** (202) 690-0881 in the Management Support Staff (MSS).

Travel Cards. In recent weeks, many GIPSA travelers reported that their travel cards were declined during hotel check-outs or when trying to secure airline reservations. The declination is occurring due to the \$5,000 credit limits on the cards. Travelers are allowed to spend up to 50 percent of their travel card limits per billing cycle (per month); therefore if an employee travels for an extended period of time, their monthly limits are exceeded while in travel status.

Travelers, travel arrangers, and supervisors should monitor the travel activities of their employees and determine if the travel costs will exceed

travelers' monthly limits. If this is the case, supervisors should prepare a brief, written request (e-mail is acceptable) to **Rose Alexander** or me and include the following:

- Name of Employee
- Circumstances related to the travel (TDY detail, consecutive travel, extended travel, foreign travel)
- A conclusion date (for temporary travel needs)

The credit limit will be increased within one business day of the request and lowered to the original limit when the credit balance is paid in full.

The request must come from the employee's supervisor, since current Departmental regulations only allow a \$2,500 limit, unless an acceptable justification is provided to the Agency.

For questions or further clarification, please contact me at telephone 202-720-7045 or via email to monica.m.alexander@usda.gov.

GOVTRIP Update. The Agency will participate in a GovTrip "kick off" in **November!** Details on the event and the migration from FedTraveler to GovTrip are forthcoming.

Grain Inspection Advisory Committee to Meet

The Grain Inspection Advisory Committee will meet November 28-29, 2007, in Denver, CO.

The Advisory Committee provides advice to the GIPSA Administrator on implementation of the U.S. Grain Standards Act. More information about the Advisory Committee is available on the GIPSA website. Go to www.gipsa.usda.gov, and under the section "I Want To," click on "Learn about the Grain Inspection Advisory Committee."

The agenda will include discussions about the Agency's financial status; organizational and technological enhancements that are improving service delivery; the pilot study to contract for export service provision and supplemental labor; improvements in the issuance of phytosanitary certification; the Agency's work in assessing wheat functionality; GIPSA's role in the ethanol market; and the relevance of the official standards for soybeans and other products.

For further information contact Terri Henry at (202) 205-8281.

More Names, from page 6.

Yohanna Lorio, ITS, received an extra effort award for support of the FGIS New Orleans Field Office, inventory control, CuSum support, FGISonline applications and customer support, leading to the success of the ITS Operations Branch.

Marsha Love, ITS, received an extra effort award for support of the Portland Field Office, inventory control, CuSum support and customer service leading to the success of the ITS Operations Branch.

James Magee, New Orleans, received a time-off award for displaying a high level of competency and professionalism.

Gary McBryde, Industry Analysis Division, received an extra effort award for standardizing data collection, analysis and reporting in P&SP.

Barbara McDougal, Industry Analysis Division, received an extra effort award for assistance made in entering and processing data received from the industry annual reports in addition to performing regular assigned duties.

Patricia Ogunyale, ITS, received an extra effort award for her ability to maintain and coordinate payroll, training, documentation, meeting notes, travel documents, various contracts, and folder maintenance.

Irene Omade, ITS, received an extra effort award for her ability to maintain and coordinate payroll, budget information, documentation, various contracts, and folder maintenance.

Ruth Ortiz, Budget and Planning Staff, received an extra effort award for initiative and extra effort in providing BRIO training and support to GIPSA field and headquarters personnel in FY 2007.

Tracey Paugh, ITS, received an

extra effort award for her role on the GIPSA Application Modernization project, and her knowledge of the configuration management process, which has been instrumental for the timely deployment of GAM software.

Gayle Pounds-Barnett, Midwestern Regional Office, received a spot award for her assistance and support of IT projects, which benefited GIPSA.

Nathaniel Puryear, New Orleans, received a time-off award for maintaining an effective mycotoxin/protein program during the coordinator's absence.

Diane Reeves, ITS, received an extra effort award for professionalism and assistance in leading the desktop and laptop inventory that helped the Agency meet Departmental deadlines.

Carol Remmers, ITS, received an extra effort award for continued knowledge and perseverance in ensuring that GIPSA is current with Departmental security initiatives, along with ensuring our IT environment remains safe from threat.

Steve Rigden, ITS, received an extra effort award for outstanding support, personal commitment, technical skills, and teamwork on the GIPSA application modernization.

Horace Robinson, New Orleans, received a spot award for providing exemplary and exceptional service to our customers and the Agency on a special project.

Kraig Roesch, Western Regional Office, received an extra effort award for an outstanding level of performance, accomplishments and dedication in reviewing over 30 formal investigations, partnership with DOJ, and providing legal guidance to the

staff, has contributed greatly to the success of the office.

John Rollins, Eastern Regional Office, received a spot award for his assistance and support of IT projects, which benefited GIPSA.

Leon Ross, Robert Evans, Bobby Webb, Stephen Mattison, Carroll Wilson, and Martin Davis, New Orleans, received time-off awards for their consistent skillful performance, work ethic, and helpful attitude.

Robin Rother, ITS, received an extra effort award for continued professionalism and assistance on all GIPSA and other related projects.

Denise Ruggles, Field Management Division, received a spot award for assistance with implementing the GIPSA Electronic Operating Plan System in FY 2007.

Joseph Russelburg, Mary Vial, Julia Matherne, and Alvin Sumler, New Orleans, received spot awards for doing an outstanding job performing gate checks at three export locations.

Gilbert Sanchez, ITS, received an extra effort award for continued professionalism and assistance, and knowledge of VPN, Microsoft Desktop, Altiris and customer support, leading to the success of the ITS Operations Branch.

Roger Schneider, Industry Analysis Division (IAD), received an extra effort award for managing the Livestock and Meat Marketing Study in addition to providing leadership as acting director in IAD.

*Continued, see
Still More Names
on page 9.*

Still More Names, from page 8.

Marsha Schwartz, Technical Services Division, received a spot award for assistance with the GIPSA Financial Update at the June 2007 Advisory Committee Meeting.

Ernestine Taplin, New Orleans, received a time-off award for a superior job while performing her sampling duties at Cargill Reserve.

Terry Taylor, Midwestern Regional Office, received an extra effort award for exemplary commitment in managing the financial operating plans and budgeting process, resulting in more efficient use of financial resources.

Dennis Thalacker, ITS, received an extra effort award for outstanding personal commitment, technical skills, and teamwork in supporting the ITS Network/Telecommunications Branch.

Brian Teer, Stuttgart, received an extra effort award for his assistance and support of critical Agency information technology projects.

PaQuita Thompson, Industry Analysis Division, Washington, D.C., received an extra effort award for assistance made in verifying, entering, and processing data received from the industry annual reports.

Patricia Tolle, Western Regional Office, received a spot award for assistance and support of IT projects, which benefited GIPSA.

Amanda Tucker, Office of the Administrator, received an extra effort award for developing and coordinating the administrative training for GIPSA.

Janet Walton, New Orleans, received a spot award for providing outstanding and exemplary training to customers.

Henry Wang, Industry Analysis Division, Washington, D.C., received an extra effort award for conducting the risk analysis of industry participants and contribution to indemnity fund analysis.

Regina Ware, Industry Analysis Division, Washington, D.C., received an extra effort award for developing two databases for the entry of dealer/market data and assisting with data entry.

Bryce Wilke, Midwestern Regional Office, received an extra effort award for providing leadership and commitment to correct the illicit weighing practices that existed at 28 livestock markets in the 11-state Midwestern region.

GIPSA Idea Hotline Update

*Norma Phelps,
Washington, DC*

No ideas were received on the GIPSA Idea Hotline during October.

GIPSA Hotline Ideas Accepted and Approved for Implementation During November 2007

This list does not necessarily indicate that the idea was implemented as suggested or that it is currently in place (it could be in the development/implementation stage). To avoid the chance of misinterpretation, please call the Hotline if you have any concerns or questions regarding the following idea.

☛ **Develop a Custodial Account Instruction Pamphlet**

Keep those ideas coming in! Send your ideas to the GIPSA Idea Hotline via e-mail: gipsa-ideas@usda.gov; FAX to 202-720-1015; or telephone 800-455-3447 or 202-720-1013. **For more information on the hotline visit <http://ingipsa.usda.gov:8010/>**

Employee Assistance Program

Call for confidential help.

Washington, DC personnel, call...
1-800-222-0364

Field personnel, call...
1-800-222-0364

Passwords are Good. Passphrases are Better.

Joe Garrity, Washington, DC

Passwords are part of our everyday lives. We use them for everything from our computers at work, to basic email communication, to our bank accounts, and even for shopping. But think about what you're protecting and how you protect it, and ask yourself these questions:

How important is it to keep your information safe, at work as well as home?

When was the last time you changed your password for your personal data? Your email? Your online banking? Are your passwords "safe enough"? Are they short for convenience? Are your passwords all the same, to make it easy? Does anyone else know them? How bad would it be if your password was stolen?

The Office of Management and Budget recently mandated additional security on all Federal government systems, including more stringent password requirements: minimum password length is 12 characters; maximum password age is 60 days; and alpha-numeric passwords are required.

GIPSA will comply with this new security mandate in the coming months, so it is wise to get into the habit of using longer/more frequent passwords now to make the transition easier. It also helps to get into this habit for all of your personal passwords as well!

Strong passwords protect your computing resources. By now you should know the rules for creating a good password. Follow these rules to create strong passwords:

- Use a combination of upper and lower case letters, numbers, and at least one special character, if permitted by the system. Acceptable special characters include \$, ., !, %, ^, and *.
- Use two numbers or symbols in the first eight characters.
- Pick long passwords, at least 12 characters in length (more is better).
- Don't use a common dictionary word, a name, a string of numbers, or your login ID.
- Protect your password from misuse.
- Do not let anyone else know or use your password – this is a violation of USDA policy.
- Use different passwords for each system, computer, or network connection.
- Change your password periodically (at least every 60 days), even if it hasn't been compromised.
- Don't write your password down. Don't post it on your computer or anywhere around your desk.
- Be aware of when a password is sent securely across the Internet to protect yourself. Sites that begin with "https://" rather than "http://" are secure for use of your password. If the Internet site you are entering your password (this means it is encrypted and cannot easily be read by other people) on does not start with "https://" then the password is not sent securely and you should not use this password on any accounts that you care about.
- If you suspect that someone else may know your current password, change your password immediately.
- Don't type your password while anyone is watching.



But, is this enough? Some computer experts believe more can be done. Using passphrases is an extra bit of security that can prevent others from guessing your password or using software to 'crack' it, which happens more often than you think.

*Continued, see **Passphrases** on page 11.*

Passphrases, from page 10.

One of the easiest to remember and hardest to crack password methods is the pseudo-random password. The actual password is generated from an easy to remember passphrase that is important to the user. This phrase can be the words from a book that you particularly like, words from a song that you always remember with ease, a statement that some powerful figure made that you will NEVER forget. The key to a successful password is to create a phrase that is easy for you to remember, but no one else will ever think about attributing to you.

Good Passphrases

- Passphrase: My older(zero) Brother's Birthday Is April(4) Twenty Second Nineteen Sixty three(3)
Password : m0bbi4t\$ns63
- Passphrase: "Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought..."
Password : 4scanseyeagou... (arrived at by choosing the 1st 2 letters from each word until a total of more than 12 characters resulted).

Bad Passphrases

- Person's Name, password "robert5"
- License Plate, password "PSU-FAN"
- Number Place, password "Nittany1"
- Easy to Guess, password "*****", "password"

When picking passwords, avoid the following:

- Your name, spouse's name, partner's name, pet's name, or your child's name, names of close friends or coworkers, names of your favorite fantasy characters, your boss' name, or anybody's name!
- The name of the operating system you're using
- String of numbers or characters, like 1234, abcde
- The hostname of your computer
- Your phone number or your license plate number
- Any part of your social security number
- Anybody's birth date
- Other information easily obtained about you (e.g., address, alma mater)
- Words such as wizard, guru, password, gandalf, and so on
- Any username on the computer in any form (as is, capitalized, doubled, etc.)
- A word in the English dictionary or in a foreign dictionary
- Place names or any proper nouns
- Passwords of all the same letter
- Simple patterns of letters on the keyboard, like asdfg
- Any of the above spelled backwards
- Any of the above followed or preceded by a single digit

Now that you have some better ideas for strengthening your password, we encourage all GIPSA users to immediately change your password at work, and think about the rest of your passwords. Doing so will help remind all of GIPSA that being 'security aware' on your computer is important at USDA, as well as home.

Practicing good computer security makes all the difference.

Native Peoples of the Chesapeake Region

Dawn Cowan, Washington, DC

The theme for this year's American Indian/Alaskan Native Heritage Month is "Singing Our Stories in Our Own Voices: A Celebration of Native Culture through Music and Song." This article is in observance of American Indian/Alaskan Native Heritage Month.

Every place in the United States has an ongoing Native American story, and our nation's capital is no exception. Washington, D.C. sits in the Chesapeake Bay region, surrounded by Maryland and Virginia. For more than 10,000 years, native peoples created thriving societies along the shores of numerous rivers that feed into the beautiful and environmentally rich Chesapeake Bay. They lived in connection with the seasons and natural resources of the region. They settled in villages made up of wooden longhouses inhabited by extended families. Labor was generally divided, with women responsible for agriculture and men for hunting. Everyone cooperated in harvesting fish and shellfish from bountiful rivers and estuaries. Throughout their histories, these societies adapted to difficult circumstances and unforeseen changes. Adaptability has been necessary for survival of native peoples and their cultures, even to the present day. When the English established their first American colony in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607, the Chesapeake Bay region included three major Native chiefdoms, systems of government made up of a group of tribes under the influence of a central chief. The three chiefdoms were the Powhatan, Piscataway, and

Nanticoke. Most of the tribes living in the Chesapeake Bay region belonged to one of these three chiefdoms, although there were some tribes who kept their independence.

The people spoke related languages from a language family called Algonquian. The central chiefs were men selected from families that inherited and passed their leadership rights from generation to generation. They usually lived in larger towns and oversaw a system of village commanders, or *weroances*, who could be men or women. An elders council advised the chiefs. The members of the council were called *wisoes*, and decisions were made in a council house called the *matchcomoco*. Holy men—elders who conducted spiritual ceremonies—also had a voice in the chiefs' decisions. There were also "medicine men," who were tasked with physical and spiritual healing. Leaders called *cockarouses* assumed command in times of war. The chiefs were unlike European kings or emperors; they were expected to work like everyone else and usually made decisions in consultation with other leaders.

Most of the Chesapeake Native tribes who have survived and thrive today descend from the Powhatan, Piscataway, and Nanticoke chiefdoms. The tribes that did not originally belong to a chiefdom often became part of one to be afforded greater protection from the colonists. Other independent tribes dispersed to various parts of the continent, where they merged with other tribes. Centuries of dispossession from their origi-

nal lands have left far fewer native tribes in the present than there were in 1607. Yet, the people remain and so do many Powhatan, Piscataway, and Nanticoke names on the landscape, evidence of the rich cultures that once inhabited the entire region. The nature of the struggles facing Chesapeake Native peoples today has changed, but they continue to live with the difficult legacy of colonial history.

Source: National Museum of the American Indian, Education Office, Smithsonian Institute

Comment Period on Ethanol ANPR Reopens

GIPSA extended the public comment period on the Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking seeking comments on whether there is a market need for GIPSA's role in differentiating grain attributes for ethanol production, as well as standardizing the testing of co-products of ethanol production, commonly referred to as "distillers dried grains." The comment period, which originally closed on September 18, was extended until December 4, 2007.

GIPSA is seeking comment on the market need to offer GIPSA testing services to better describe the type and quality of grain purchased and the feedstuff produced for ethanol production and marketed as various forms of distillers grains.

For Your Health

Mavis Rogers, Washington, DC

Infectious Diseases: How they spread, how to stop them. From your sniffing seatmate on the bus to the raw chicken on your cutting board, everyday life is full of potential infectious disease hazards. With germs so common and seemingly everywhere, the question is this: Just how do you protect yourself from germs that cause infectious disease?

Knowing how germs spread can help. Find out how an infectious disease is transmitted and more importantly, what you can do to minimize your risk of infection.

Infectious diseases spread through two types of contact. An easy way to catch most infectious diseases is by coming in direct contact with someone who has one. This “someone” can be a person, an animal or for an unborn baby, its mother. In addition, many germs can linger on an inanimate object, such as a tabletop, doorknob, or faucet handle. When you touch the same doorknob grasped by someone ill with the flu or a cold, for example, you can pick up the germs he or she left behind. If you then touch your eyes, mouth, or nose before washing your hands, you may become infected. Some infections occur from organisms that naturally live in the environment but are not passed from person to person. Examples include fungal infections like histoplasmosis or blastomycosis, as well as bacterial infection such as anthrax.

Infectious diseases spread through the air by droplet transmission, such as those expelled during coughing or sneezing when sick with the cold and flu; and particle transmission, wherein disease-causing germs travel through the air that you breathe. Infectious diseases spread through vectors and vehicles such as bites and stings from mosquitoes, fleas, lice or ticks; and food contamination, including germs from undercooked hamburger or unwashed fruits or vegetables.

Prevent the spread of infectious diseases and decrease your risk of infecting yourself or others by doing the following:

☞ **Wash your hands often.** This is especially important before and after preparing food, and before eating and after using the toilet.

☞ **Get vaccinated.** Immunization can drastically reduce your chances of contracting many diseases. Make sure to keep your and your children’s recommended vaccinations up to date.

☞ **Use antibiotics sensibly.** Only take antibiotics when necessary. And if they are prescribed, take them exactly as directed – don’t stop taking them early because your symptoms have gone away.

☞ **Stay at home if you have signs and symptoms of an infection.** Don’t go to work if you are vomiting, have diarrhea, or are running a fever. Don’t send your child to school if he/she has these signs and symptoms either.

☞ **Be smart about food preparations.** Keep counters and other kitchen surfaces clean when preparing meals. Promptly refrigerate leftovers – don’t let cooked foods remain at room temperature for extended periods of time.

☞ **Pay special attention to cleaning the “hot zones” in your home.** These include the kitchen and bathroom – two rooms that can have high concentrations of bacteria and other infectious agents.

☞ **Don’t share personal items.** Use your own toothbrush, comb and razor blade. Avoid sharing drinking glasses or dining utensils.

☞ **Travel wisely.** Don’t fly when you are ill. With so many people confined to a small area, you may infect other passengers on the plane. And your trip won’t be comfortable, either. Depending on where your travels take you, talk to your doctor about any special immunizations you may need.

☞ **Keep your pets healthy.** Bring your pet to the veterinarian for regular care and vaccinations. Keep your pet’s living area clean.

With a little common sense and the proper precautions, you can avoid infectious diseases and keep from spreading them.

Courtesy: Mayo Clinic

GIPSA News is the employee newsletter of the USDA Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration. Send your news, ideas, suggestions, comments, questions, or thoughts for the next issue to:

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